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ABSTRACT

The author of this paper proposes that a position paper by a course instructor be presented prior to or at the first session of the course in order to provide the student with information if the course will meet his needs. Such a position paper may also serve to provide a basis for dialogue that considers in a theoretical and in a personal way the kinds of learning for mastering basic information, generates self-directed inquiry, and affords an opportunity for the personal-professional development of those seeking to become practitioners in the helping professions. Such a position paper should include a statement of the instructor's posture with regard to the teaching-learning process and teaching style, and a statement of what may be expected of and by the instructor. The author of the paper includes her own position statement as an example. It is suggested that a postcourse evaluation be made by the students using a Likert-scaled instrument and personal conferences with the students. (HMD)

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PURPOSES AND METHODS IN THE LEARNING-TEACHING PROCESS

(A position paper concerning graduate education for the helping professions.)

College students, for the most part, judge the efficiency of their professors by their expectations and by their predetermined criteria concerning what constitutes good teaching. Confusion will mount as the course continues if students are expecting one approach while the professor is using another. Students expecting to be passive recipients of highly structured information giving lectures while at the same time the professor is seeking through questioning and reflective responses to enable the students to formulate their own motivating questions will be dissatisfied with the class experiences. The results may well be non-productive distortions and unnecessary two-way negative evaluations. The students may move toward an appreciation and an understanding of that which is different from their expectations, or they may become more entrenched in their judgment of the value of the class experiences. By making an effort to communicate his overall goals and related methodology and by focusing specifically on his own professional orientation, some of the counter-productive negative student judgments that result from different orientations and expectations may be avoided.

The following is a description of an attempt to bridge the gulf between student and professor expectations. Some students may not wish, and perhaps should not enter into a particular kind of learning experience. For this reason, the statements should be presented before, or at the first meeting of the class--thereby giving students

a choice to continue or not conintue with the particular course. Also, a position paper statement may serve to provide a basis for dialogue that considers in a theoretical and in a personal way the kinds of learning designed to master basic information, to generate self-directed inquiry and to afford opportunity for the personal-professional development of those seeking to become practitioners in the helping professions.

THE POSITION

My own professional orientation to the art and science of learning and teaching has developed from within the cognitive-field approach. I tend to think in Gestalts frequently made up of input from the spectrum of the various disciplines related to the social and behavioral sciences. Recently the contributions of the humanities, as philosophy and literature, have become increasingly influential in the formation of my cognitive structures. I believe this particular approach is most important and needs to be considered, understood, in the arean of competing philosophies and strategies in higher education today. For this reason, I wish to make a number of statements that may help clarify my purposes and methods of teaching in order that students may develop more accurate perceptions concerning the kind of educational experiences afforded them and what kinds of endeavors are expected from them. The following statements are my views of role and possible outcomes from this particular psychological-philosophical orientation to teaching and learning.

Cognitive Life Spaces and Reflective Teaching

Teaching requires that the professor strive to know each student's cognitive field, his present level of attainment, plus his motivational dynamics, his goals. This is a big order. Through class discussion, written assignments, and personal conferences, students can help the professor come to these individualized understandings. Then to help the student enlarge, go beyond his present intellectual life space, so to speak, the student needs to seek to comprehend the professor and other authorities regarding the topic under consideration. A student can help himself in this task of growth by entering into class discussion, raising his own questions, asking for elaboration and clarification of the issues at hand. The word education

means to "draw out." This "drawing out" should be a two-way process. It is sometimes called reflective teaching.

The Abductive Method, etc.

Closely related to reflective teaching and learning is that which has been called by some educators (in the John Dewey philosophical stream) the abductive process. This approach seems especially applicable to graduate study designed to prepare professional practitioners in the helping professions. Basically this teaching methodology strives for a combination of the deductive and inductive strategies of scientific inquiry. It is deductive in that theories are presented and need to be understood and related to concrete situations and practices. It is inductive in that in addition to knowing theories students develop their own "look, see, observe, and categorize." From their observations students may add meaning to accepted theories, may critique theories, or even develop new theories of their own. This approach of using both the deductive and inductive approaches--alternating and weaving the two together is demanding, sometimes confusing, but offers a structure and process whereby students can prepare themselves to be able to exercise leadership in their professional endeavors.

Professional Leadership and Dialogue

Professional leadership not only means (to me) that one lead in his academic discipline, but entails a second responsibility--that of building bridges of understanding and appreciation among persons, groups, cultures. In short, it means exercising leadership toward world citizenship. Understanding and appreciation does not mean agreement. Dialogue and clarification helps one discover this is "I," this is "not I." Only with realization of the this is "I," this is "another," personally and professionally, can constructive meaning and dialogue develop.

Self-Directed Inquiry

Central to good teaching is the support and encouragement given to students as they become self-directed learners. As one follows his own inquiries he frequently develops new insights concerning the interrelatedness of his knowledge. A wholeness, a unity that is distinctively his own mastery begins to form. Maxine Greene, Professor of Humanities at Columbia University puts it this way: "To plunge, to choose, to disclose, to move--this is the road it seems to me to mastery."

If at the termination of the quarter your interests have developed to the point that you have more questions you wish to pursue, to

study, to investigate, then something very important has happened which may "spark" a process which could continue throughout your life. This your professor hopes for, but cannot program it with built-in guarantees. Much depends upon the student's attitude, his active involvement. Prof. Snygg indicated that the professor could best foster this highly significant learning endeavor by sharing with the students his own unanswered questions.

WHAT YOU MAY EXPECT FROM ME

In addition to sharing unanswered questions in this process of inquiry, you may expect me to map out for study the basic areas where mastery is required of all students. The knowledge to be mastered to fulfill the contract of the course as specified in the college catalog will be delineated.

Do not expect complete "text-book like" notes from lectures. I expect to give guides to your study. You are to fill in, build understanding from your reading to the areas delineated. I will help you locate sources to thoroughly develop the topics introduced.

Beyond the minimum requirements essential for the discipline studied, opportunity will be afforded for cooperative planning. In this aspect students indicate areas of special interest and develop activities that seem most helpful and worthwhile to them. It is an opportunity to become an active self-directing scholar.

You may expect that I will be willing to suggest and help you find significant references, readings, research reports and authorities related to your special interests. Feel free to ask!

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU

First, I expect an adequate investment of your time. There is no shortcut to learning that has lasting significance.

Make a special effort to assure your understanding of the intent of assignments. Sometimes students bring previous meanings to a term paper, for example. By doing this, one may miss the special target, the purpose, of the particular assignment.

The utilization of library resources is important. If you have difficulty locating materials, ask a professional librarian. Student help sometimes is not versed on all the many reference helps.

Genuine dialogue is expected. If ideas are not fully communicated, ask for clarification. Keep asking until ideas are fully understood. Points at which you are bothered may be dealt with in personal conference; however, I trust that personal conferences will also be used to share ideas that challenge you--or ideas for which you have real enthusiasm.

DIFFICULTIES

There are inherent difficulties in the above approach. It is not a prescribed mastery of information as some other approaches, but I believe it is worth the risks--that is if students aspire to grow and develop beyond themselves and their mentors and to be leaders in the unchartered frontiers of tomorrow.

One difficulty is--for those who experience the growth there is no doubt of the value of the approach, but for those who are not expecting to respond passively to information afforded them, they are not pleased. The structure was not adequate. The entire experience is too ambiguous since they remain passive recipients. The frustration evokes anxiety and defensive behavior (See the article on graduate students and anxiety in the Colorado Journal of Educational Research, Spring, 1972).

The real problem with this particular approach to teaching (with other approaches also) is with evaluation. If a student has entered into the study, has attained significant mastery and found self-directing inquiry that is meaningful, he is well pleased. Hopefully, the professor can evaluate these positive experiences of growth. But the one who has not entered into this kind of inquiry cannot know what it is he has missed and is likely to put blame elsewhere than on himself, for he has maintained an expectation of being a passive recipient. The S-R delineation of all the bits of information he needs to master is still his criteria of a good course; however, with a common understanding (teacher and student) of the learning phenomenon, we may maximize possibilities for significant achievement for all.

IN CONCLUSION

Students perhaps should have opportunities to choose classes that enable them to remain within the safe confines of the "known" and should know in advance courses that have objectives to offer more than inert information.

Each person's way of perceiving, of making meaning of the past, and of developing ways of facing the present and the unknown future may

be similar to others or may be uniquely his own--probably a combination of both. But whatever the mix, the highest in the scholarly endeavor requires that we (teacher-student and student to student) mutually discern and value another--especially with reference to the "growing edges."

I hope the "going beyond" is your goal and that this course for one, and other UNC experiences will support you in this endeavor. It may make all the difference between a "mail order catalog" kind of education and education that enables you to order the unknown.

DISCUSSION

As a professor develops professionally, he comes to an understanding concerning how he views the teaching-learning process and what approaches seem most effective as he seeks to accomplish his educational goals. And it is important that the professor keep sensitive to what students perceive as his goals and methodologies. For a person increases his impact if what he professes and what he does "rings true" to the decoders ~~encoders~~ of his messages.

Today there are college students especially at the graduate level who are willing and able to profit from learning experiences designed to enable students to go beyond their professors and to be challenged by the questions of the unchartered frontiers. There are other students whose resistances are unshakeable by the call for open-ended inquiry. The two groups probably cannot be taught satisfactorily within the same structured learning experience.

If the latter group, the highly structured group, represent the majority of the students, and if student ratings of faculty are the determiners of the buyer's market and thus of the professor's future as is part of the current educational dynamics, then a statement as

developed in this paper may help students, faculty and administrators to focus on the true educational issues

To keep two-way communication open concerning what is planned and what actually is accomplished within a certain approach as has been delineated above, students, at the conclusion of the course are asked to respond unsigned on a likert scaled response as: In your judgment are the professor's personal-professional statements congruent with the way the class was structured and conducted: Specifics positive and/or negative ~~were~~ are called for. The second evaluative question ~~should~~ could be concerned with the efficiency of the particular approach as the student views his achievements. It would be helpful to have a third line of evaluative question concerning the students' investment of time and of himself in study for the course. Finally a statement should be conveyed to the students indicating the professor's willingness to consider, in personal conferences, the course in retrospect after ~~first~~ final evaluations are completed.

In summary, the position paper may help students clarify the professor's overall goals and expectations. Students who prefer more definite structuring of exactly what to read, what to study can frequently see their dissatisfaction as differences of preferred philosophy and methodology rather than leaving the explanation as a "poor teacher." On the other hand there is the risk that the defensive student may use the paper to prove to himself the professor's inconsistencies.

The most important outcome, however, is the self-directed inquiry that is engendered. For instead of completing a course, the

majority of students find that areas of interest and inquiry for continued study have indeed been "opened up." The vitality of their efforts will insure continued study. Therefore, to give this, and other approaches their final evaluations, one should conduct a follow-up evaluation one year after and perhaps another three years later.

Perhaps we are at a watershed period with reference to the issues of goals of education. If the real issue in professional education is whether to encourage students to continue their self-education--to go beyond as compared with those who want educational objectives to be concerned only with definite content mastery, then the approach presented offers one way to begin to build and test a model for vital self-directed professional preparation.